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"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

No. 289.—THIRD SERIES.

SATURDAY, JULY 14, 1894.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

MARRIED TO ORDER.

A ROMANCE OF MODERN DAYS.

By ESME STUART.

Author of "Joan Vellacot," "A Woman of Forty," "Kestell of Greystone," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XLV. BITTER WATERS.

WHAT Penelope said so emphatically was true. She had no fears at all about Philip's safety. She thought he had rushed away to brood over his misfortune, and that, the fog having overtaken him, he had been unable to come back. The word "death" had not really presented itself to her.

She wanted him to return, and that soon, then all the story of her short love and happiness would be over. Oh, it was already over! She knew it from Forster's face, but she could not accept the decree. Her heart rebelled, her proud spirit would not stoop and take up its burden—a burden which she and her uncle had so carefully laid upon their own shoulders.

No, he was not dead, but death was to be her fate; for death, she now realised, may come many times before the body is laid in its last resting-place.

All night Penelope tossed from side to side unable to sleep. Sometimes, she dozed for a few minutes, then she fancied she saw the door opening slowly to let in her father. The evil look of madness was so like the reality which she had seen the previous evening that she started up, uttering a low call for help, only to find herself in the darkness and in solitude. She even struck a match to make quite sure that no one was in the room, and when dawn slowly began to pierce the black veil of night, the Princess, getting out of bed,

drew back the thick curtain, and gazed out over the familiar view. Shy and tremulous little pink clouds came early to prepare for the coming of the sun. To-day they had smiling faces; and, with a soft wooing wind to help them, they cleared away the remains of yesterday's mist. Then suddenly the sky began to paint pictures on its pearly-grey palette. First appeared tender yellow and delicate pink washes, then every tone was deepened into stronger streaks of red and orange, till, as if by the help of a magic wand, the sun, the bringer of all life, himself appeared, striding into the arena and demanding the worship due to him from all created beings and of all created things.

Often and often had Penelope watched the sun rise, but never till to-day had the scene struck her with so much awe and with such mystery; never before had she felt so small before inanimate nature.

However, humility was not a state of mind in which she could long remain. As further sleep was impossible, she determined to dress and go downstairs. Philip would by this time have come in, and she would meet him in the presence of Dora and Forster. Afterwards—!

She opened her door, walked down the passage, and descended the stairs leading into the hall. Some one would be there seeing to the comfort of the departing guests. Most likely it would be Philip or her uncle, for the Princess knew that though he was not nobly born Philip's courtesy was never at fault, and that this man of no descent was as much a gentleman as was the greatest noble in the land.

As she came down she saw that the hall door was open, and that the sun now streaming in made glorious patterns on the floor, and danced madly over the old woodwork.

Nero was lying on the steps, but his head was laid low between his paws, as if he had just returned from a long journey. At that moment the butler came through the hall, and Penelope said :

"Williams, has any one come down? When will the carriage be sent round for Mr. Bethune?"

Williams looked up at her, and then for the first time since his arrival, Penelope saw a look of surprise on the face of the well-trained servant.

"The carriage has been countermanded, ma'am."

Penelope did not ask any other question. She went towards the passage leading to Dora's turret chamber, though she could not exactly tell what she wanted to do nor what she wanted to say to the young girl. She only felt that something had happened, she knew not what, and she would not try to guess.

In another moment she found herself face to face with Forster. He was coming from his sister's room.

"I was looking for you, Mrs. Winskell," he said, and his tone was so strange that Penelope hardly recognised it. The once happy ring in it was gone. "Come in here."

He opened the door of the library, where the sun shone in brightly, and where all was beauty and brightness, making it difficult to believe in yesterday's gloom.

"The Duke sent me to tell you all we know. I could not leave this place before we were certain that Philip cannot be found. Oldcorn and others have been looking everywhere since dawn; they even sent a messenger to the station to see if— if— but no one had seen him there, and the only supposition is that—" Forster sank down on a chair and hid his face.

"You can guess," he groaned. "They say he must have lost his way in the fog, and that he must have fallen in the Rothery. If so it may be some time before his body can be recovered. Some of those rocky passages go so deep down, and the boulders would—would—"

"Oh, no! no! it is impossible," said Penelope, her face becoming deadly pale, "quite impossible. Why do you say that after such a short search? It is preposterous. He knew the paths so well, the fog need not have made him lose the glen path. It is impossible."

Forster started up again. Her vehemence seemed partially to restore his strength, now so nearly exhausted.

"You say so, and I—I feel it too, but I dare not say it to others. Philip could not fall—by accident into the Rothery; but—but oh, if it were not an accident!"

The words seemed to hurt him, and as he spoke he turned his face away.

"The other idea is preposterous also," she said slowly, but her very lips were deadly white, and she slowly placed her hand on the back of a chair, grasping it firmly.

"Is it, Penelope?"

Her lips framed the word "Yes," but no sound was audible. At that moment the Duke came in. His manner had that exaggerated affectation of assurance which people put on when they are face to face with anxiety.

"Penzie! Ah, I see that Mr. Bethune is telling you. By some strange chance all the messengers have missed Philip. It is very extraordinary, very; there is of course some easy solution to the matter, which we cannot see at present. Mr. Bethune, I must insist on your resting. You look utterly worn out. Where is Miss Dora? We must not alarm her."

"I have told her we cannot go to-day," said Forster. "Don't think about me. I shall stay here till Philip is found."

"He will walk in presently and rally us on our fears," said the Duke, taking out his snuff-box and laughing a little. "Penelope is not nervous. Even when you were a girl, child, your courage was always proverbial."

"It is foolish to suppose Philip lost his way," she repeated. "Barring some accident he will return."

"Of course, of course," answered the Duke. "I do not doubt it, not for a moment. In the meanwhile I insist on your coming to eat some breakfast, Bethune."

The Princess took the lead; with firm step and head erect she led the way back to the dining-room. Then she went and questioned Betty, and hearing that Oldcorn was in the kitchen, she had him sent for, and talked with him quite quietly, but with clear decision, as to what he had already done, and what was next to be done to find the missing Philip. Oldcorn shook his head, and declared shortly that the young master was not above ground, on the Rothery estate at least; if he had been he would have been found, for he, Oldcorn, had taken the dogs with him. Stump could find anything, given the scent, and as to Cupear, he was not often wrong. They found the

scent to the house well enough, but lost it in the glen. As to farther up on the mountain, no fool would have ventured there in the mist, and Mr. Philip was no fool. The fog was certainly thick, and there was the river, but—

"Oldcorn, he must be somewhere," said the Princess haughtily. "You must find him. He may have fallen asleep and got numbed by last night's cold and damp."

If he were on the estate, Jim Oldcorn would find him, of this the Princess might rest assured, and as soon as Betty had given him a bit of breakfast, he would go off again, though there were still six men on the search.

At this moment Dora came downstairs with scared eyes and a very pale face.

"Penelope, it isn't true, is it? Where is he?"

"He will be found shortly, I am sure. Don't frighten yourself unnecessarily. In the fog he fell over a boulder or a stump of a tree and cannot get home. The explanation is quite simple: Come and have some breakfast; but really you should not have put off your journey. What will Mrs. Bethune say?"

This explanation might be very simple, but still the morning hours dragged on and nothing was heard of Philip. Forster was out with one search-party, and the Duke himself went with another. For some time Penelope remained where she was, absently looking out of the great bay window in the drawing-room, then she went upstairs and put on her out-of-door things. She could not stay within when every one else was out; even Dora had escaped from the house as if she were flying from a haunted spot.

So, quite alone, the Princess walked out into the sunshine. It was a little cold, and the tints were quickly deepening in colour. All the brightness of the day could not hide the signs of speedy decay which was taking place all around. The migratory instincts of many birds were making themselves felt; soon many of them would forsake the glen where they had sung so joyfully. Faithless to their shelter, they would no longer rejoice the ears of loving listeners.

Penelope took the glen path and tried to recall all that had taken place there. Her girlish visions and her girlish hopes and ambitions rose before her. They had seemed grand and noble to her then, now they seemed so strangely to have altered, and to have turned against her. Then all at

once her heart gave a bound. One thing she had learnt, a truth precious above all others. She knew the meaning of the word "love," the joy and the pain of it. Then there flashed into her mind the reason of her presence in the glen—Philip!

The trees seemed to whisper "Philip," and the loveliness of every leaf and all around her added reproach to the sound.

"He will come back," she said, lifting her head proudly, "and I shall live my life with him. If it were not for father it would be easier; we could go abroad, or live in London—not here, not here, where everything is out of tune—Oh! one can live an outside life, there is so much one can do to drown thought, and the world is big. Society will fill up one's time and all the emptiness."

She had now reached the end of the glen, and before proceeding further leant over the wicket as she had so often done. Her lithe, free step mechanically took the path upwards towards the great mountain. Would Philip be there? No, of course not. They, she and he, had climbed it one day and had met at the summit. The fierce storm had swept over them and then peace had come, because Forster had arrived.

Oh, yes, Philip would come back, of course he would. And life would begin again, life and emptiness. Why had she not been told about this possible and fearful intangible emptiness when she was young? Why had no one warned her about this enemy, and shown her that she might as well try to remove a great mountain as to fight against it? It had conquered her—her, a Princess, descended from such a long line of ancestors! Or was it love that had conquered? Then Forster's image filled her mind. To-day she had tried to put it away every time it had intruded itself upon her thoughts, but even that invisible power conquered her now. His face rose before her mind's eye. She saw his look of horror, and she knew that she had made him fall from his high ideal. The part of him he treasured most, that which had made him master and Philip his disciple, was swept away. Dimly she understood that a man may lose all that the world prizes, and that he may suffer infinity of sorrow, but that he will not suffer so much as he who loses his ideal. Forster had found in her, as he thought, the ideal of womanhood, but through her he had lost his higher ideal of man's union with God, his diviner nature.

Very dimly she saw this, and it made

her climb faster and with more determination up a narrow path. On and on she went, all the time fighting against this knowledge, this new certainty.

Then after what seemed to her to have been no measurable time, so quickly did the minutes fly, she found herself at the tarn. Dark, deep, and mysterious it looked, even in this autumnal sunshine. The sight of it made a break in her ideas. Looking at it, thoughts of her father came crowding to her mind. His clouded intellect had somehow brought out all the worst features of his own character, and now they were strengthened and increased. But added to it all was that unhinging of the brain balance which is often brought upon a man, not by the hand of God, but by his own wilfulness.

Between father and daughter there was some strange link, some strange affinity, which prevented Penelope from feeling that he was wholly wrong, and yet the likeness to herself made her shudder and recoil, as when a mother traces the physical likeness between her innocent child and the drunken man who is its father.

In one thing they were alike; they had both felt a deep-rooted prejudice against the man of meaner birth, the man whose benefits they accepted, but whose personality they rejected.

The smooth, glassy blackness of the tarn for a short time fascinated Penelope. It acted upon her brain as did the magic mirror upon the minds of the ancients, and as she gazed she saw a face gradually taking shape from some mysterious nebulous substance. She watched its birth and its development with the eagerness of a maiden asking for the one she loves best to be revealed to her. Little by little it was evolved out of misty nothingness, and slowly, very slowly, it took form. Then an icy chilliness took possession of her, born of an inexpressible horror; a beautiful face was before her, of beauty unmistakeable, but it was her own face, and on its features and in its eyes was the hideous look of mad cunning which she had seen on her father's countenance only the evening before.

With a low, barely repressed cry of horror, she started to her feet and hurried up the dangerous ridge leading to the summit of the mountain. She felt impelled to go on and on, away from that face, away from herself, and her fear gave her courage and strength. She did not feel the cutting rocks as she grasped them with ungloved hands, she found no difficulty in the ascent,

and not for one moment did she turn giddy at the sight of the precipice below, so that in half an hour she stood near the cairn and viewed all its wonderful glory, the wide plain of mountain-tops, a sea of beauty interspersed with waves of blue and purple glories, while the winds, blowing softly round her, seemed to whisper:

"All these things will I give thee, if——"

CHAPTER XLVI. WILL HE BE FOUND?

SHE sat down on the slab of stone under the shelter, and held her breath. She knew not what the whisper meant, her limbs seemed in an instant to be paralysed, and only her brain was active. Her thoughts chased each other to the rhythm of these words:

"Philip is dead—if thou wilt fall down and worship me."

"Philip is dead." Before this all her thoughts, all her unspoken words had been, "Philip is alive, and the future is emptiness"; now the words, "Philip is dead," seemed to echo from every neighbouring hill. Even the torrents far below softly murmured it, and the desolate silence of this great mountain-top seemed to breathe the unspoken words, "Philip is dead."

That face, so beautiful and so terrible, which she had seen reflected in the tarn, had first suggested the thought, and it was the horror of the suggestion which had hurried her up to this lonely spot. But the words were here too. Penelope at last, instead of turning away her mind from this thought, boldly faced it.

"If he is dead, how can I help it? If—if he at last came to realise the truth, how was it my fault? It was not mine, but his, his own, his very own; he would not believe me when I told him so. Perhaps he—he—— no, he lost his footing, he was reckless; how could I tell what he would do? How could I help it? Have I ever ordered my own life? Never, never, but now—now——"

She stood up suddenly; she was alone on the mountain-top, alone, but she must soon return to the valley. It was a long way back to the Palace, and she must not further add to the anxiety of the household. She turned to look eastward and westward as she had often done before, wondering which of the distant views was the more wonderful; to-day both seemed meaningless, both merely flung back her thought, "Philip is dead; you are free, free as we are, as these

wild mountain-tops are free." "Free as the air," echoed the breeze, brushing against her face and lifting the straying meshes of her hair. For the first time in her life, if Philip were dead, she thought, she could say she was free.

Then hastily leaving this region of wild thoughts she hurried forward, determined to descend alone down the dangerous path by which she had ascended. When she at last safely reached the black tarn she would not linger one moment near to its terrible reflection, but hurried on along the familiar way, her agile feet scarcely touching the ground as she ran, rather than walked, back again towards her home.

Quick as she had been, when she neared the Palace, the sun was already descending towards its appointed resting-place. It must be nearly four o'clock, she remembered, and she asked herself what would be the news she would hear?

Looking on far ahead, and straining her eyes towards the wicket gate, she thought she saw a figure standing there as if waiting for her. "Whose figure was it?" she said to herself; then, as she came nearer, the form took shape, and before she could see the features her own face flushed. It was Forster. She was now almost afraid to go on, only there was no other alternative. She must go home that way, for if she took any other path, it would be almost an hour longer before she could reach home. It was certainly Forster, and he must be looking for her, for she must be very plainly seen as she stepped quickly down with the free step of a mountain maiden.

Forster did not take one step to meet her, but she felt no resentment, she was only anxious to hear what he would say and how he would look. Had it been possible to avoid this meeting, she felt that at this moment she would have done so, but it was not possible.

Summoning her old dignity to her aid, she slowly approached him. Why did he not speak—at once?

"I hope you have not been looking for me?" she said, as soon as she was near enough to him.

"For you?" said Forster in a tone of surprise. "No, we have looked for him all day, and—and the search is hopeless."

"Who says so?"

"They all say so. If he had been where mortal man could find him, we should have found him. I must prepare you for the truth."

The words did not sound commonplace as he spoke them. On the contrary, they reminded one of the judge delivering sentence to the prisoner at the bar.

Penelope was silent, and Forster repeated:

"I am certain Philip is not where the eye of man can see him."

"It is too soon to say that," she answered in a low voice, but her tone carried no personal conviction with it.

"No, we have been using every available means. And these shepherds are people whose keen glances take in everything."

"But it is impossible to search everywhere. In the opposite wood, for instance, no one could—"

"Jim Oldcorn can be trusted; his opinion is that——" Forster paused; his tone was hard and dry as if he were recounting something quite disconnected with himself. "His opinion is that Philip is dead, and that the hidden depth of the Rothery can alone give up the secret."

They had, as it so happened, by this time reached the very spot where so lately Philip had stood beside them. Penelope did not recollect it, but Forster suddenly stopped short.

"It was here, here, Mrs. Winskell, don't you remember? Is it nothing to you, that you can be so calm? Don't you understand that as far as can be known Philip is dead, and that we—no, I killed him? Have you no word of—of regret or sorrow for him, the truest friend on earth?"

He spoke hurriedly and sternly, but he did not come one step nearer to her. Penelope would have allowed no one else to speak to her like this, but before him she was silent, helpless. His anger hurt her acutely.

"Why do you say all this to me? Your words have yet to be proved, and besides—besides, no Winskell was ever a hypocrite."

"This is not the time to be proud of such poor virtues," he said scornfully. "Penelope, don't you see that this makes me—me—Philip's murderer? Can't you understand that, if nothing else?"

"Hush, don't speak so loud. Don't say such things. We are not answerable for the actions of people who wilfully place themselves in danger. It is false, all false."

"Why?" he asked all at once, mentally changing places with her and trying to catch at a straw of hope.

But that "why" was not answered, for voices were heard close at hand, and

Penelope walked on quickly, whilst, as if he did not even wish to be seen in her company, Forster turned back to meet the speakers.

It was the Duke and Jim Oldcorn, both looking weary and spent.

"Ah, Forster! how shall we break it to her? There seems to be no hope. Jim thinks the same; he says there has not been a yard of ground left unvisited, and I verily believe it is true. It is most strange, most unaccountable! We know he did not go anywhere by rail; besides, why should he? He had not time to get much beyond the estate, and the dense fog would have prevented him going quickly anywhere on unknown ground."

"The Rothery," said Forster.

"Yes, that is, I fear, the real solution, the only one in fact. He must have been wandering home and have missed his path, and fallen in. The torrent would bear the body into one of those underground passages, and it may be years, or never, before any traces are discovered. The water so destroys the scent that the dogs failed to follow it up."

"The news will be in the papers," said Forster, making a great effort to be calm. "Perhaps, if by chance he has been heard of—"

"But we must telegraph to his father. Really it seems an awful catastrophe to have to announce."

"We must not give up hope yet, we must not. I can't believe—and yet—"

"I met your poor sister wandering about looking like a ghost. I think, Bethune, this is now hardly the place for so young a girl."

"No, I think you are right; I will take her home to-morrow and come back soon, directly I can, for I must be of use."

"Thank you, you are a true friend."

"Me! Oh, no, don't say that!"

"My dear fellow, you are quite unnerved; but, indeed, Bethune, for Penzie's sake we must both keep up. She has enough to bear, poor child. So young and left a widow."

"A widow?"

"Why, yes. Philip's death will leave her in a very sad position."

"A widow!" repeated Forster, and then he followed the Duke in silence, whilst Oldcorn, telling the latter that he must go to the farm to see after the King's wants, left the two to proceed home alone.

Penelope was still standing in the hall when they entered. She was white and

motionless, but there were no tears in her eyes.

"My dear child," said the Duke, coming close up to her, "I don't know how to tell you; I was saying so to Forster just now." He took her chilly hands in his. "There has been no trace found of Philip, not one; it is a pure mystery. But now it can hardly be doubted that—that—he has fallen into the Rothery, and if this is so, it may be months before we discover any trace of him."

"You must telegraph to—to his people," said Penelope in a voice that sounded far off and as if frozen.

"Yes, I shall send the dog-cart to the station, and telegraph from there. There is time yet before dark, and Joe must sleep at Meretown to-night. I don't think he can get back."

"No, he must sleep there."

"But you, my child," the Duke gave a searching glance at her face, "you—you must take care of yourself."

He hardly knew what to say. Her calmness was very unnerving. A man hates a woman's tears, but is almost more upset when he sees her possessed of the fortitude of a man.

"Does Dora know?" she said wearily.

"No, not the last hopeless news. Bethune says he will take her home to-morrow."

"Yes, that will be best."

"But he will come back to help us."

Penelope heaved a little sigh of relief. It was better to have him here as he was than not at all. Some day he would leave off looking as he did now. He would see it was not her fault. She had never done anything which was against her ideas of honour.

"I will go to her," she said, and moved away, walking very gently out of respect for the dead, and as the two men involuntarily watched her, it seemed to one of them that she was the most perfect woman in creation, but to the other she appeared as the star for which he had longed, but which, when grasped, had turned to scorching fire. The pain of that burn was still exquisite.

Dora was alone, sitting disconsolately by the window. Her face expressed a new feeling of despair, a feeling she had never before understood or experienced.

The Princess entered the room with the same quiet, proud step.

"Dora!" she said softly, and Dora started up.

"Oh! have you heard anything?"

"No, nothing. My uncle says that—that——"

"No, no," said Dora, shrinking a little, "not that."

"That there is very little hope now."

"Oh, Princess! and—and——" The girl hid her face in her hands, sobbing as if her heart would break.

"Hush, hush—what?"

"And you did not love him!"

"No, I did not love him. I have told you so."

"After Forster, I always thought that he was the noblest man on earth."

"After Forster," repeated Penelope under her breath, but Dora did not hear her.

"And you never, never cared about him, whilst he loved you so much. I see it now." Then she glanced up at her and saw the look of haughty pride on Penelope's face.

"I ought not to say this, but I can't help it. I always thought that—that——"

"Dora, for Forster's sake never say such a thing again. If not for mine, at all events for his, for Forster's sake."

THE OLD ROAD TO OXFORD.

THE old road to Oxford starts, as one might expect, from Oxford Street. Not that the latter can be considered old as a street, and its present magnificence is of very recent date, for thirty years ago or so one remembers it as a paltry kind of thoroughfare. But, anyhow, here is the track that, leading past the old hospital of St. Giles, brought the travellers out upon the bare fields adorned by the hideous Tyburn tree.

If you are for the coach, indeed—the "Age," which runs on alternate days from Northumberland Avenue to Oxford—there is an actual start from Charing Cross, but at one point or another the main road is soon reached, which runs broad and fair before us, surely the handsomest and noblest of all approaches to great London town. With the fresh turf of the Park; the tufted groves; the sparkling waters; and over all the bright haze of the teeming town, out of which rise the tall towers of Westminster; with the jingle and rattle of all the gay world in the ears, and the sight of it, with all its carriages and horses, its horsewomen curvetting hither and thither, there is nothing finer anywhere

than the view from the top of coach or omnibus as you rattle past the railings of Hyde Park and the stately mansions of Tyburnia on a fine summer morning.

Notting Hill, too, is cheerful enough with its traditionary gate, that once levied toll on all the world on wheels; and then comes Shepherd's Bush Green, where the old thatched cottage, associated by tradition with a conspiracy against the life of the Lord Protector, is now no longer to be seen. There is some decadence here, perhaps, in the hitherto pleasant level, and in nomenclature we are lowered a peg to the "Uxbridge" road; but presently we rise again from Acton vale by the hill, where we see the grounds of old Berrymead Priory, cut up into new streets and redolent of bricks and mortar. But Acton High Street is still quaint and pleasant, and then we come to cheerful Ealing, which has quite the aspect of a watering-place, with its breezy common, its donkeys and donkey-boys, and one half expects to get a blink of the sea at the top of the hill. But no! all is street again right away to Hanwell, where something like country really begins to appear, with a glimpse of the pretty valley of the Brent and its encircling hills. From Hanwell we are all on the flat, the great plain of the ancient Middlesex forest, all very fertile and pleasant, but where the air is a trifle thick, and the soil a thought heavy. And we have brickmakers at work, and factories here and there as Hayes is past, and here we have

The slow canal and yellow-blossomed vale;

for the meadows, along which passes the Grand Junction Canal, are all bright with buttercups, and the arable land is still more yellow with the flower of the mustard-plant. Then comes Hillingdon, a kind of annexe to bigger Uxbridge, with big public buildings in the way of workhouse and barracks, and then by a gentle ascent, through a very rich and fertile track to Uxbridge itself—a pleasant, thriving little town, which has still preserved some of the picturesque features of a former age.

It is Saturday, and there is something like an old-fashioned market going on beneath the pillared arcade of the old market-place. Here are stalls of every description, with provisions, confectionery, a taste of millinery, toys and trinkets, and a hundred other things, and a crowd of people too, really marketing, with their baskets and big packages. Out of the throng rises a quaint balustraded staircase

conducting to what was once the corn-market above. Years ago those stout pillars would almost groan under the sacks of corn piled up layer upon layer in these old rooms, for the corn-market at Uxbridge was a pitched market, where grain was sold in bulk only, and not by sample. There is a corn-market still at Uxbridge on Thursdays, but the farmers now bring their sacks of wheat in their pockets—as schoolboys carry marbles.

Cheek by jowl with the turret of the market-place is the tower of the old church, squeezed up in a corner as if room had been precious in the days when it was built. The whole scene, with the quaint gabled houses looking down on the general throng, has hardly changed very much since the days when the Roundheads and Cavaliers met to try and settle the contest which was desolating the land; when all in England, and in Scotland too, were asking if it would please Heaven to send peace upon this treaty at Uxbridge.

The Church, too, comes into the plot, for here it was that the first Sunday after the Commissioners of the Parliament arrived at Uxbridge, the Reverend Christopher Love, a stiff Presbyterian, preached a sermon which gave such offence to the Royalists that one of the first acts of the King's Commissioners was to demand satisfaction in these terms: "Wee have certain information from divers persons present in Uxbridge church yesterday that there was then a sermon preached by one Mr. Love, in which were many passages very scandalous to His Majesty's person, and derogatory to his honour . . . therefore we desire justice against the man that he may have exemplary punishment."

The Parliamentary men, who comprised the Earls of Northumberland, Salisbury, Denbigh, Denzil Hollis, Harry Vane, and others, replied in an evasive manner, and no harm at that time came to Mr. Love for his boldness. But the sequel is curious; for some years after, when the second Charles had swallowed the Covenant and had been crowned at Scone, Mr. Love was found to be implicated in a correspondence with his co-religionists in Scotland, tending to a restoration of the monarchy. Love was condemned to death, but great interest was made to secure his pardon. Cromwell was then in Scotland, and was appealed to in favour of this zealous and popular preacher; and it is said that he despatched an order to respite the execution of Mr. Love, with the intention of granting

him a pardon. The messenger who conveyed the letter, however, fell into the hands of some Royalists, who overhauled his despatches. And sundry of the band had heard Mr. Love's sermon at Uxbridge, and recalled his bitterness against the late King. "Let the fellow suffer, then!" they cried as they burnt the letter of respite. So Mr. Love was executed on Tower Hill, a few days before the battle of Worcester was fought, which settled the business for a time. But the sermon at Uxbridge was dearly paid for.

Now, if anybody wants to sample the road to Oxford after the fashion of the corn merchants, in a very small compass, there are few pleasanter drives than from Uxbridge to Gerrard's Cross, a distance which a small one-horse 'bus performs in something under an hour.

There is something refreshing in the leisurely performance of the country omnibus; the preliminary chaff at the station with the rosy country cabdrivers; the chat with the shopmen who bring parcels, en route to the rural inn-yard, whence the final and official start is made. An ancient white horse prances bodily, assisted by a few supporting irons, over the inn door.

Surely Cromwell put up at the "White Horse"—anyhow, Colonel Fleetwood did at the "Chequers," on the other side of the road. And there is the old "Sun" opposite, which once illumined a long stretch of the high street, and which assuredly shone alike on stern-faced sectaries and roystering Cavaliers in the stirring days of old. And when the claims of the present have been disposed of, with the case of a stout old dame with a huge basket, who wants to travel half-price, away we rattle down the high street, and so to the picturesque exit from the town by the old bridge that gives it a name, and, indeed, first brought it into existence.

Over the road hangs the jolly old sign of the "Crown," while a board at the gable end of the inn announces this as the "Old Treaty House," which indeed it is, and a handsome old mansion with projecting bays and heavy mullioned windows, something like Haddon Hall on a small scale, and a genuine old relic of the days of the Tudors. When the "Treaty" was about it was the house of one Mr. Carr, and the Commissioners met in a fine old wainscoted room, which is still well preserved. One would like to taste the treaty ale—Oliver's entire from the Huntingdon Brewery. But our coach rattles on, and

over the twin bridges that cross the canal and the gently winding Colne. "That's where the best eels come from," says the driver, pointing with his whip to the stream that comes wimpling down among old mills and malt-houses. And have we not seen Colne eels announced in the fishmongers' shops as something distinctly precious? Perhaps it was only the exigencies of metre that suggested:

The Kennet swift for silver eels renowned.

Anyhow, the Colne has now the call in the market. Pope, when he rather unhandsomely alluded to "Cole's dark streams," could hardly have then visited the river at Uxbridge, where it is as bright and pleasant as one could wish to see. And, looking back, what a charming little picture is formed by the river, the bridge, and the gaily-painted barge, that rests in a nook of the old canal, with horses resting, too, and immersed in their nosebags, while a woman with a bright shawl over her head passes briskly along with a bucket!

Away we go along the level road, everything in full luxuriance, lush meadows, trees and copses, hedgerows full of wild flowers, and stretches of willow-bordered streams. Then there comes a hill, a strong, steady ascent, and it proves to be the frontier of a region altogether different from any we have yet passed through. It is Red Hill, so called from the red sand of which it is composed, but although steep it is not such an ascent as it was before the era of fast mail-coaches. For the old road of all winds up to the level of a little inn, which now, like a feudal castle on a small scale, looks down on the tops of vehicles and people's head-gear as they pass below. It was deemed a grand work in its day, no doubt, this cutting away the crest of a hill to accommodate the King's highway; and Bob Logic, as he posted up from Oxford—for it was in the Tom and Jerry era that the thing was accomplished—must have viewed the works with amazement.

From the top of the hill a charming view is spread out of all the country we have quitted: Uxbridge with its roofs and turrets, lying on the slope of a gentle hill, the river winding on its way to the distant Thames, whose valley lies in the bright haze of distance, while a dark storm-cloud hovers over the white towers of Windsor, and the Surrey hills in long ridges fade on the distant horizon. In front of us is a pleasant, undulating, well-wooded country, showing broad cornfields

with the bloom of health on every blade, and crowned with the abundance of their yield, meadows, copses, sheepfolds, distilling mingled odours, not of Araby, but of tar, and wool, and turnips, but intensely rural, too. Shepherds look out from their hutches—whence they watch their flocks by night; here and there a pleasant farmhouse lies half concealed among the trees. Here and there, too, a little hamlet shows itself apologetically, as it were, so tiny is the space it occupies among the broad fields and wealth of land about it. Yet the cottages are roomy and substantial, of good solid brickwork not devoid of ornament, with the cachet of the early eighteenth century upon them.

No, those cottages were never meant for labourers—our driver agrees—"Most likely for the old Buckinghamshire lace-workers who lived about here." There is nothing left but these small dwellings as memorials of a vanished people. Their descendants are to be found in the great manufacturing towns. Nottingham has its share; and Mrs. Gaskell in "Mary Barton" shows us how the old Buckinghamshire folk thronged to Manchester in the early part of the century. Mary's mother was a Buckinghamshire woman, and Aunt Esther brought her fatal beauty and love of distinction out of the same prolific shire. And the people are getting elderly who remember seeing old women sitting outside their cottage doors, making pillow lace. Their sons and daughters were gone, and few ever came back to visit this pleasant, lonely land.

Up hill and down dale brings us to the top of a hill where there is no dale in immediate prospect, but where a wide open heath stretches out fringed with houses, and with a strange-looking church rising among a tufted edge of firs and wind-tossed elms. Is it a church, though, this wonderful structure? "It is a church, sure enough," our driver assures us, "and was built by two maiden sisters." Oh, yes! we have heard of the two maiden sisters before, they occur often in the folk-lore of churches. They had but one trowel between them, eh? which they chucked from hand to hand. "Never heard of that," says the driver stolidly, "but they do say it was all done by day labour. And as a monument to a brother who was killed—no, not in the Crusades, but it might have been the Crimean War. But it's all written down on the church tower." And so it is if one could read it from the padlocked wicket gate. After all it is a

little disappointing to find that there is no folk-lore about the matter, but that two maiden sisters really built the church at their own expense, and after some Italian model, with campanile and dome, and not uncomely, after all, though not exactly in correspondence with surrounding scenery.

But here our little omnibus finishes its journey, and taking a turn about the surrounding common, disappears among the heather. This open plain, it seems, bears the name of Gerrard's Cross. Research has failed to discover who Gerrard was or what his Cross—perhaps he was a highwayman, or possibly only the victim of a murder. But the scene is not unknown to fame as a favourite meet of foxhounds. The Queen and the Old Berkshire have both their appointments here in the season, and then doubtless there is animation enough; the dogs with waving sterns, the sleek horses, the bright red coats and shiny top-boots, the crowd of witnesses around, all this must be lively enough, and the roomy old inn of the coaching period with its abundant stabling, "loose boxes for hunters," and what not, must feel itself among the old times again with all the bustle.

Before the old inn is a fine old sign, a bull of formidable aspect, and just beyond are the twisted iron gates that open into Bulstrode Park. Famous all over the Chilterns were the Bulstrodes, to whom tradition assigns a sturdy Saxon origin. When the Normans came they were known as Shobbins, and valiantly repulsed the strangers from their native heath. But making terms with the Conqueror, the head of the family rode up to Court on a tawny bull of the wild native breed, his seven sons forming a body-guard about him. Hence the name and the "achievement" that swings from the old sign.

It may be supposed that the Bulstrodes did not value the Stuarts much when their time came, and at the beginning of the civil wars Henry Bulstrode mustered the fighting men of the three Chiltern Hundreds under a commission from the High Court of Parliament, and fought at the side of his neighbour Hampden. But not long after the main line of Bulstrodes failed for want of male heirs, and the domain was sold. The infamous Jeffreys held the place for awhile. The Bentincks followed, and more recent associations are with that pleasant Duchess of Portland, who made a sort of Rambouillet of the place for the "précieuses" of her time, with Mrs. Delaney

and Mrs. Montague, of the "feather hangings," as aides and inmates. Finally, after passing through the hands of the Somerset family, the place went to Sir John Ramsden, who has built a new house on the old site, crowning it with the old rampant bull.

But what a Salvator Rosa-like glen is this we are coming to, the road winding into the hollow and lost in dim shadowed recesses! If it were not that the banks of the ravine are all in a blaze of rhododendron blossoms, the place might be called "horrid-looking," and just where you might expect to be called on to "stand and deliver." But if there be traditions of highwaymen, they are unknown in the neighbourhood, though here is a veteran stone-breaker who might be expected to have heard something about them. "No, sir, never heard o' no highwaymen other than us chaps as mends the roads. But there's burglars, sir," continues the old man, brightening up, "broke into Bulstrode House, they did, the night afore last, only they was frightened away by a maidservant as banged her door at 'em."

There are tramps also, and the road is lonely enough. Here are two sturdy but wretched-looking vagrants seated under a high bank by the side of the road. They whisper together, and one comes forward. "Help a poor chap along the way, walking all last night; come from Birmingham and meaning for London." The scene is picturesque enough, the wooded gorge, the dark thundery sky, the tattered vagrants. But they are harmless enough, and pass along.

The way is delightful; the park, separated from the road by a low open railing, is of all things the most charming; fine groups of trees; wonderful sweeps of greensward; the house crowning a knoll and nearly hidden in foliage. What verdure! what freshness! the birds in full song, rooks lazily cawing, the wind sighing among the branches. The only thing to complain of is the almost oppressive scent of the hawthorn, with the showers of white petals that fall continually and whiten one like a snowstorm; the road, too, is white with the fallen blossoms. It might be counted, along with the disturbance caused by the nightingales, as among the exquisite distresses of this favoured region.

And all is complete solitude. A mile without a house or a human creature by the way. And then there comes along at full tilt a tramping family as wild as any lot of savages. An ill-looking man, a drabish

woman, and half-a-dozen little boys, the eldest hardly ten, skirling along the road, and two more infants in an old perambulator, which holds also a little bundle that contains all the worldly possessions of this thriving family!

Where Bulstrode Park gives out we have Wilton Park on the other side of the road, with pleasant drives and avenues, and a more genial aspect, for cricket is going on in one well-rolled corner, and the way through the park is hospitably thrown open to the coach, which just now we meet skimming along from Oxford, the guard sounding a cheerful note on the horn as his scarlet coat lights up the wooded glade.

And then Beaconsfield begins, called Beckensfield by all the countryside, the name having nothing to do with a beacon, it seems, but with the Beechen Forest, that gave its name to the dwellers therein, and to the county. Such a wide street with shops and inns, and a handsome church close by with a good square tower, but not striking within save for some fine old altar tombs, more or less despoiled by time, which are said to have belonged to the old Bulstrodes. Edmund Burke lies beneath the centre aisle of the church, under a modern brass; and in the churchyard, under a noble old walnut-tree, sleeps Edmund Waller the poet. And a fine marble monument he has, obelisk, urns, and slabs with inscriptions, all recently cleansed and shining as marble ought to shine. The walnut-tree, too, is appropriate, for such is, or was, the crest of the Wallers, who seem to claim kinship with the ancient Dryads.

Beyond Beaconsfield the road is a little dull, perhaps, for a mile or two, and then you come to Loudwater, a village with a pleasant heath, from which there is an enchanting prospect of the Thames in some of its loveliest reaches. But our way is up the valley, which is of the simple pleasant character of the chalk formation, with a stream, and mills, and meadows, and marshy patches, and the rounded forms of the chalk downs in the distance.

Then we reach High Wycombe, placed, as its name implies, high up on the spurs of the Chilterns, a handsome market-town, with a pleasant high street and old-fashioned market-place. Wycombe had many industries in the old time—cloth-weaving, lace-making, straw-plaiting—but these are gone, and now the cane-bottomed chair is paramount. You meet them on the roads, all the subsidiary villages are full of them;

chairs are the circulating medium hereabouts, and you buy houses and lands for so many hundred dozen chairs.

But a hundred years ago Wycombe was something of a military centre, and in 1794 General Gwynne was raising a regiment of cavalry there. Strange stories were told of the cruelties practised on recruits, of floggings and ferocious drills, and of cruel Major Shadwell, who was afterwards, shot by a deserter when commandant at Maidstone. But a recruit who was there in 1794 seems to have experienced nothing but kindness from his officers, and yet he was the awkwardest of the awkward squad, and when he mounted his horse everybody cleared out of his way. This was Comberbatch, alias S. T. Coleridge, who would scribble Latin verses on the stable walls, and correct the faulty quantities of the officers' mess. Had it been De Quincey, now, who had enlisted, what charming pictures we should have had of old Wycombe, and what analytic details of a little incident that occurred at the time!

For it was in the winter of 1794, one dark stormy night, that the night mail stopped to change horses at Wycombe, and the guard, as was his custom, ran up to the post office for the mail-bag. The postmaster, not to be robbed of his night's rest, would, when he heard the guard shouting for the bag, lower it by a string from his bedroom window. To-night the string hung there but no mail-bag, and the scared face of the postmaster appeared at the window in response to the other's shouts.

"Why, you've got it," he cried.

For it seems that some rogue had watched the play of postmaster and guard, and starting a minute before the latter, had taken his place, and snatched the mail-bag. The culprit was caught in trying to negotiate some letters of change that formed part of the booty, and turned out to be a young fellow of hitherto good character named Noah Pierce. Strange to say he was not hanged, but transported, and, perhaps, his descendants are still flourishing in the colonies.

To increase the military distinction of Wycombe, a military staff college was founded there in 1799, which formed the nucleus of the present military college at Sandhurst, to which place it was removed in 1812.

Beyond Wickham lies West Wycombe, with its modern church in an old British camp on the summit of a hill, though the village has climbed down to the valley.

And here the road divides. The coach follows the rather longer but more picturesque route by Princes Risborough and Thame; but the old coach road lies across Stocken Heath, once famous for highwaymen.

Each main road had its accepted hero among the knights of the pad, and ours is Jack Shrimpton, who was born at Penn, over the hills yonder, of honest, reputable parents, but who took to the ways of the idle 'prentice, enlisted in Wood's Horse, deserted, and took to the road. "Did always the most damage between London and Oxford, insomuch that scarce a coach or horseman could pass him without being robb'd."

And in the woods here between Wickham and Stocken church Jack overtook a Middle Temple barrister, who admired his stout roadster and offered him thirty guineas, which was all he had about him, for the animal. "Mine is a horse," replied Jack, "worth its weight in gold, and if you was to know all, has procured me more money than ever Bucephalus got for Alexander." And then he robbed the lawyer of his guineas and rode off.

At Gerrard's Cross, too, Shrimpton was at home, and robbed his friend Littleton, "a face painter, of Silver Street, and three or four other coaches" that were then in sight. He returned his friend's money secretly, with interest. And meeting once a farmer with bailiffs hauling him to gaol for debt, he paid the debt and handed the farmer the acquittance, and afterwards pounced upon the bailiffs and robbed them of all they had, galloping off chuckling at having done a good deed in a profitable manner.

Such exploits naturally endeared him to people who had nothing to fear from highwaymen, and many regretted his fate when he was hanged at Bristol for shooting a watchman in a drunken brawl.

But night is drawing on, the road is lonely and eerie, and there is not much in the way of a lively character, although the country, if one could see it, is full of quiet charm, but,

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight !

And here is Wheatley Bridge, over the Thame, where "Mull Sack" stopped the waggon that was taking the soldiers' pay to Oxford and Gloucester, in the days of the Commonwealth, when the daring rascal sacked four thousand pounds. But after all, it is comforting to see the myriad lights of Oxford glimmering afar.

A good many years ago Alexander Pope rode the same journey, and describes its close in a letter to Teresa Blount :

"The shades of evening overtook me. The moon rose in the clearest sky I ever saw. About a mile before I reached Oxford all the bells tolled in different notes ; the clocks of every college answered one another and sounded forth—some in deeper, some in softer tone—that it was eleven at night."

And happy travellers by road may still enjoy the charm that Pope depicts. True, a whole town has sprung up on the way, and the approach is by rows of glittering lamps ; but there is the old unrivalled Oxford, over Magdalen Bridge, and Magdalen's unrivalled tower clearly cut in the silver moonlight.

THE STORY OF A POSTCARD.

▲ STORY IN THREE CHAPTERS. CHAPTER I.

LYON THESIGER was standing at his study window looking idly out on to the lawn. It was August, and the wind that fanned his cheek was warm and balmy. Children's voices floated towards him on the breeze ; the vague scent of roses and honeysuckle was in the air. He stood there, smiling.

The sun shone in at the muslin-draped, quaint old casement windows, and threw brilliant shafts of light along the dark, polished floor. It shone, too, on the golden head of a fashionably-dressed woman who was sitting in one of the capacious arm-chairs that stood by the fireplace, and who was fanning herself with a gently discontented air.

"Really, Lyon," she went on, in her languid, well-bred tones, continuing a conversation that had evidently been begun some time before, "you must take my advice in this instance ; you must indeed. You are not doing your duty by those children."

"They seem very happy," said Thesiger, as a burst of childish laughter came to his ears. "Isn't it a pity to disturb them ?"

"They must be educated, my dear. You would not like poor Isabel's children to grow up ignorant, unpolished little heathens, I am sure."

"Oh, come," said Thesiger, his smile vanishing at the sound of his dead wife's name, "that is putting things a little too strongly, Gertrude."

"Not a bit," returned his sister undauntedly. "Patsy and Dick are both as ignorant as they can be, and I don't believe Dolly knows her letters yet."

"Well," said Thesiger, turning from the window with a long-suffering air, and throwing himself down on a sofa opposite his sister, "what is it you want me to do?"

"Really, Lyon, you are a most exhausting person to talk to," said Lady Devereux, waving her fan rather vehemently to and fro. "I have spent the whole afternoon in explaining my views to you."

"Oh, yes; I think you did mention a school for them," said Thesiger, pulling out his cigar-case; "but you know quite well I shall never send them to school, Gerty."

"Then you must have a governess. I dare say that will be the best thing after all. A governess is such a convenient sort of person. You need never know that she is in the house."

"Oh, a governess; that's a new idea," said Thesiger reflectively. "I don't object to that so much. Since you think they have outgrown poor old Nurse Murdoch's intellectual powers, I dare say that is the best way out of the difficulty."

"Then I will look one out for you when I get home," said Lady Devereux, delighted that her advice was to be taken at last. "I will ask Angela Raymond if she knows of one that will do. She recommended my last two governesses to me, and they were most suitable. I sometimes wonder she doesn't go in for teaching herself, she is very poor, I know; but perhaps it is just as well she doesn't," added Gertrude Devereux, with a sidelong look at her brother.

"Angela Raymond? Oh, that's one of your protégées, isn't it? I think I remember hearing you speak of her. Why shouldn't she teach if she wants to?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Lady Devereux evasively. "She isn't at all the style of girl to— dear me, Lyon, how chilly it has grown. Will you shut the window, please?"

Thesiger rose to obey her request, and forgot entirely to ask any more questions about Angela Raymond, which was precisely what his sister wished him to do.

Lady Devereux left the next day, and in a week's time Thesiger received the following note from her:

"DEAR LYON,—I have only time to write

you a few lines, as Robert has telegraphed for me to join him in Paris, and I am leaving by the night mail. I did not forget about your governess, but I have not been able to find time to see her personally. I wrote to Angela about it as I told you I should. I haven't time to copy her postcard, so I send it you with this letter. I have hardly read it myself, but I see it is in Angela's most absurd style. What possessed her to write such stuff on a postcard I don't know. But the people she recommends are generally very suitable, so I should advise you to write to her and get Miss Kendall's address at once.—Yours in haste,
"GERTRUDE DEVEREUX."

Thesiger read the letter through with his careless smile, and then opened the postcard, which was doubled in half. It ran thus:

"I know exactly the person to suit your brother—a Miss Kendall. She is well educated, extremely plain, and quite perfect in every way. Her eyes are a moral education in themselves. She gets up at four o'clock in the morning and sits in the corner of a damp meadow to see the sun rise. Cannot pass a leaf or a tree without classifying it. Is deeply impressed with the sacredness of childhood. Is hopelessly conscientious. Has trained scions of the aristocracy, and has rows of framed certificates. If you like the idea I'll send you her address. You might look out for something of the same kind for me. Things are beginning to pall on me here. I feel I should like to teach the young idea how to shoot, only I might end by shooting the young idea!"
"A. R."

The smile on Thesiger's face broadened.

"So that is the kind of person Gerty wants me to have for Patsy and Dolly," he said to himself. "Poor little mites! I don't want all their buoyancy taken out of them just yet. And so Gerty has stipulated that the governess is to be plain, has she?"

He laid the postcard down and went on with his breakfast, glancing at it from time to time. The handwriting was extremely small and clear.

"There's some originality about that girl, I should say," was the outcome of his meditations, "and if she will undertake my three pickles she shall. I'll write to her to-night."

And write he did. But he did not think

it necessary to communicate his intention of doing so to Lady Devereux.

Angela Raymond was alone when Mr. Thesiger's letter was brought to her. She opened it with some curiosity. When she had read it she laughed a little.

"So Lady Devereux sent on that postcard to him! I wonder what I put on it? I have completely forgotten."

She carried the letter in to her eldest sister, who had ruled the household with a rod of iron ever since her mother died.

"I think I shall take that," she said deliberately, throwing the paper across the table. "It will be a change, at any rate."

"I am sure it is quite time you did some work of some kind," returned Theodosia, with her most elderly air. "Papa was saying last night that he could not keep us all at home much longer."

"Then this has come in the nick of time," said Angela, yawning carelessly.

"It is a nice letter. What did you put on the postcard?" said Theodosia.

"I can't remember. It must have been very impressive, or the man wouldn't want me."

"You don't usually write impressive things," said Theodosia, with a glance at the rebellious dark eyes and curly black hair. "Your letters are generally a mass of nonsense."

"I suppose this Thesiger man likes nonsense, then."

"This Thesiger man! What a way of speaking!" said Theodosia reprovingly.

"I do hope you will be careful when you are there, Angela."

Angela made a slight grimace, but said nothing, while Theodosia continued:

"You cannot be too circumspect in your behaviour under the circumstances, for I presume Mr. Thesiger is a widower."

"You have no idea how well I always behave with widowers," said Angela with her demurest air.

"I know how you behave with curates," said Theodosia sharply.

"Curates in general or Mr. Griggs in particular?"

"Both, I should say."

"But, my dearest Theodosia, these little curates are made to be flirted with! No one ever thinks of taking them seriously. When they grow into vicars it is another matter, but nice little curly-headed creatures with eighty pounds a year must be treated accordingly."

"It is quite time you left off this way of

treating everything as a joke, Angela. You are twenty-five now, and ought to know better. I did imagine that your engagement would have steadied you a little, but I think it has made things worse."

"Well, it won't do that much longer, at any rate," said Angela serenely, "for I broke it off yesterday."

"Broke it off!" Theodosia nearly swallowed a mouthful of pins in her excitement, for she was engaged in pinning together a serge skirt for her youngest sister. "Whatever do you mean? You must be mad!"

"Not in the least. I explained matters quite clearly to Gerald, who was perfectly satisfied—at least, he said he was."

"And what reason did you give for breaking it off, pray?"

"Well," said Angela reflectively, "I told him quite frankly that I had begun to dislike him. You see, I thought I could marry him because I was so tired of everything here, and I wanted a change. But now I find I can't. He was all right as long as we were not engaged, but afterwards he became very foolish."

"You will never have such a chance again. I am surprised at you!"

"Oh, I don't know. He isn't such an awful catch. And that cast in his eye is enough to make any girl think twice. I never knew when he was looking at me, and it made me quite nervous. He ought to have four times the money he has to make up for the embarrassment he has made me suffer."

"You don't seem to think of what you are making him suffer!"

"Men don't suffer much nowadays," said Angela plaintively. "Gerald was more angry than hurt, I think. He is not in the least inconsolable, and never even spoke of suicide, although he had to cross the river on his way home, and the parapet is awfully low in one place. Times are not what they were! We parted fairly good friends. I advised him to marry Polly Evans. She has a slight tendency to squint too, you know; so I expect that would make things go right."

Theodosia stabbed the serge skirt with pins in a very vicious fashion. But she had long ago found out that to discuss things with Angela, as one might with a reasonable human being, was useless. She preserved a grim silence, therefore; but, like the parrot in the story, she thought the more.

"I am to go next week," said Angela,

referring to the letter, which she had picked up. "I wonder if I shall have time to make myself a new gown!"

"Governesses don't want elaborate clothes," said Theodosia.

"No; but I must positively have two changes of raiment—don't look so shocked, Theo, that's not in the least irreverent—and this gown is the only one I have fit to wear. I think I had better have a brown holland, only it always reminds me of a deserted London drawing-room done up after the season is over."

"You are not at all a suitable person for a governess," said Theodosia, frowning at her. "You will let the children do just as they like all day long, I know."

"It is just as well to try a new plan," said Angela, rising and going over to the window. "I was brought up very strictly myself, and you see how I have turned out."

Angela's arguments were sometimes unanswerable. Theodosia thought that this occasion was one of the many when she was too childish to be answered. She pitied the little Theisgers from the bottom of her heart.

"Do you intend to go on teaching all your life now that you have given up all idea of being married?" she asked of the pale grey back that stood in the window.

"I dare say I shall end in some Benevolent Home for Aged Governesses," answered Angela without turning round, "but I don't despair of being led to the altar just yet. I dare say it will be when I am white-haired and bent; but I expect I shall prefer it to the Governess's Home."

"Angela, do be careful how you talk to Mr. Theisger!"

"I shall be as stiff as a ramrod, I assure you," returned Angela. "I shall speak when I am spoken to and not before. I shall blush whenever I meet him. I shall say 'Sir' to him when——"

"I know you will come home in a week's time," said Theodosia angrily.

"Oh, no, for the sake of the family I shall stay longer than that. Besides, I shall be such a treasure that Mr. Theisger will never want to part with me."

"You have no patience with children, you know."

"Not with Sunday-school children, I admit. I hate to have them crawling over me, and hear them say in the middle of a lesson, 'Teacher, 'ow much did yer give for the feather in yer 'at? Mother bought one jest like it the other day.'"

"You always pretend you like teaching when Mr. Griggs is anywhere about."

"My dear Theodosia, I dislike saying disagreeable things to anybody. You know what an angel I am about the house. And I like Mr. Griggs to think me a saint. What is the harm?"

Theodosia, reduced to silence once more, merely shook her head, and Angela went cheerfully out of the room. On her way across the hall, she saw, standing at the open door which led into the rose-covered porch, her late fiancé, Gerald Marsden. She went forward to greet him with her brightest smile.

"You are just in time for tea. How nice of you to come over and see us so soon!"

"I don't want any tea," said the discarded lover with some dignity, "and I only came to speak to you."

"Yes!" Angela leaned negligently against the wall and looked at him with black mischievous eyes. "What do you want to say?"

"I can't talk here. Can't we go into the drawing-room?"

"Ted is playing the violin there. It jars on one's nerves a little, but we will go there if you like."

Marsden made an impatient movement.

"Theodosia is in the dining-room," added Angela sweetly.

"I suppose the garden, at least, is free from interruption?"

Angela took a shady hat which was hanging from a peg, ready for use, and stepped out into the sunlight in a most obliging manner.

"I came to know what you meant by all that nonsense yesterday?" said Gerald Marsden abruptly.

Angela gave a sidelong look at him, and decided that it was his left eye that was fixed so severely upon her. She gazed into it as she replied:

"What nonsense do you mean?"

"Why, your saying that you did not want to marry me."

"But that was the honest, sober truth. You are a delightful friend, my dear Gerald, but as a lover——!" She shook her curly head in a melancholy fashion.

"What is the matter with me? Do not I show you enough attention? Am I not affectionate enough?"

"Much—oh, much too affectionate!" cried Angela, in tones whose sincerity carried conviction with them. "That is just what I complain of."

"How can I help showing what I feel?"

"You can't, and that's why I've broken you off," explained Angela. "And I am not going to talk any more about it. When I have once made up my mind, days of talking won't alter it. I am going to be a governess."

"A pretty governess you will make!"

"Don't be rude. I am extremely well-educated, remember. I am going to teach the three children of Mr. Thesiger."

"Mr. Thesiger!" with pronounced emphasis on the first word of the sentence.

"Yes. Mr. Thesiger. He is a widower. There is no Mrs. Thesiger."

"It won't be long before there is one, then!" said Gerald Marsden, suddenly turning from her and walking out at the garden gate.

"How nice it is that Gerald still thinks me so irresistible!" said Angela to herself, as she watched his departing figure.

THE COLOUR OF THE SEA.

To the eye capable of distinguishing the finest shades of colour, the sea presents aspects of varied and ever-changing beauty. The myriad phases of the tints it assumes under every condition of light, atmosphere, and sky, in every part of the globe, whether far from land or close in-shore, and in every state of purity or impurity of its waters, make demands on the vocabulary of colour which can be adequately met only by a master of the art of word-painting. It is sufficient to refer to the passages so lavishly scattered throughout the sea stories of Mr. Clark Russell, in which he describes, with the passion of a lover and the art of a connoisseur, the marvellous colour harmonies arising from the play of light and wave.

A small quantity of pure sea-water placed in a glass appears entirely colourless, and as transparent as the clearest spring-water. A convenient method of observing the colour of larger quantities is to sink white objects in the sea, and note the tints they assume in the course of their descent. At first they appear greenish, then the green acquires a bluish tinge, and finally all colour disappears, and they are entirely lost to view in the depths. Another way is to pass a beam of sunlight through a long tube filled with sea-water and blackened inside to prevent subsidiary reflections. Such a beam is coloured a splendid blue-green by passing through the water, and the blue becomes

purper as the depth of water increases. Blue is accordingly the natural colour of pure sea-water of great depth, and this is recognised in the sailors' expression "blue water," applied to the open ocean—the real deep sea.

In some deep seas the blue is intensified to a brilliant ultramarine, as in the Mediterranean, where this shade prevails not only in bright sunshine, but even with a slightly veiled sky, so that it is not merely the blue of the sky mirrored in the waters, but the peculiar colour of the sea itself.

It has been supposed that when the water is otherwise of normal purity, the depth of the blue depends upon its saltness. In salt-works the brine becomes of a deeper blue the longer evaporation is continued; and the deep azure of the Mediterranean, the Gulf Stream, and the ocean in the regions of the Trade Winds is attributed to the greater density of the water owing to the increased evaporation. In the Indian Ocean the colour is so intense that it has been poetically named the "Black Waters." It is doubtful, however, whether this is more than an unimportant factor in the production of the variety of ocean colours.

There is certainly not much difference between the fundamental colours of all the great oceans away from the land, but the concurrence of many observers in the general terms in which they describe each ocean appears to preclude the likelihood of these being mere variations of nomenclature, depending on the idiosyncrasies of travellers. The Polar Seas are generally described as having the ordinary blue colour of the deep sea, or marine blue, though extensive regions have a green tint. The hue of the equinoctial regions of the Atlantic is usually termed a vivid azure, and that of the Pacific a deep indigo blue. The term "celestial blue" seems of common consent to be reserved for the Mediterranean, and is for the most part accompanied by enthusiastic expressions of admiration of its splendour.

In all seas special and temporary variations of colouration are caused by reflection from the sky, according as it is clear or dark, and according to the height, distribution, and thickness of the clouds. The winds, too, have their effect. The azure of the Mediterranean with a clear sky and fine weather changes in tone when the sea is agitated, and, as the agitation increases, becomes darker and darker, while with bad weather and a completely overcast

sky its tint passes to a sombre green. The direction of the wind has also some influence on the particular shade assumed by the waters. In some cases the action of the wind imparts to the sea a perfectly livid aspect, and occasionally the greenish blue may turn to a brownish hue. When the sea is tossed into billows which are viewed in a suitable direction, a considerable quantity of light is transmitted to the eye by the crests of the waves, which act as prisms, and this transmitted light, which is always greenish in hue, is generally sufficient to add more or less green to the reflected blue. The most remarkable play of vivid colour occurs at sunset, when the surface is illumined with countless shades of purple and emerald. All these temporary phases of colour which are effected by the sun, clouds, and wind, are deceptive, as was long ago pointed out by Arago. Any particular portion of the deep sea is always in reality of the same colour, and by using a dark tube reaching close to the surface of the water, the lateral rays reaching the eye by reflection are cut off, and this permanent colour may be observed, whatever may be the position of the sun and clouds, or the state of the sky and the waves.

The darker or lighter pure blue of the deep sea almost always gives place to a more or less pronounced green on approaching the shore. This change usually begins to operate somewhere about fifteen miles from the shore, and shallow seas, or gulfs and arms of the sea, never attain the inky indigo hues of open ocean. As the depth diminishes the colour and nature of the bottom begin to show their influence. When the bottom consists of fine white sand, or—as is frequently the case in tropical regions—of white coral reefs, the water assumes an apple-green tinge, while yellow sand and coral produce a dark green tint. When the ground is largely composed of mud, the colour may become olive, blue-green, or greyish, and in such cases the agitation of a storm, by stirring up the sediment, causes a greenish-grey or brownish hue, according to the colour of the mud. The presence of dark rocks or ground is shown by a darkening of the prevailing shades. These local influences are decided, and constant in their effects on the colouration of shallow waters. Beautiful light effects are observed where a strongly reflecting bottom sends back the light to the eye through especially clear water, and similar effects have been obtained artificially in the

Mediterranean by sinking, perpendicularly, a long blackened tube, provided with a mirror at the lower end, which reflects upwards through the tube the light passing through the water, producing blue colours of indescribable splendour. Such colour indications of shallow water are of importance to the mariner, who is warned of the presence of reefs, banks, or shoals.

The prevailing blue colour of the great body of the sea is a consequence of the physical laws which govern the absorption of light by different liquids. A liquid which appears purple by transmitted light does so by virtue of the power it possesses of selecting from the original white light falling on it, which is made up of all the colours of the solar spectrum, the yellow and the green, which it entirely absorbs, allowing free passage to the red and blue, which by this mixture produce purple. Similarly a blue liquid absorbs all the colours, with the exception of blue, while in this case, as well as in that of the purple, if the layers of liquid through which the light has to pass are sufficiently thick, all colour will disappear, and both appear black.

Of the three kinds of radiant energy of which the solar spectrum is composed—heat, light, and chemical—the invisible heat rays, which extend beyond the red end of the visible spectrum, are most energetically attacked by water, and do not penetrate beyond the surface layers, where their energy is expended in evaporating the water. The absorptive action of the water, as the solar rays penetrate further, causes a progressive enfeeblement of the entire spectrum, and the various colours are cut out successively, proceeding from the red, which first disappears, onwards through the orange, yellow, and green, blue persisting longest, and if the water is deep enough, the blue itself at last disappears, and with it the last vestige of light, so that the water appears as black as ink, though, as with ink itself, there may be a feeble light reflected from the surface. Hence the very dark tint of the usually pure water of the depths of mid-ocean. In the same way the purest ice, which is found under the moraines of glaciers, where it is most compact and free from air-bubbles, which elsewhere break up the light, absorbs light so completely that it appears of a pitchy blackness. As water vapour has the same selective power of absorbing light as water itself, the blue of distant hills is due to the water vapour present in the atmosphere,

and is darker as the proportion of water vapour increases.

The dark indigo tints of the ocean are intimately associated with the purity of its waters, and the presence of suspended matters modifies the colours in a marked degree. As the shore is approached the water contains more or less detritus, worn off the land by the incessant grinding of the sea itself, or carried down by rivers, and these impurities impart to the water varied shades of green, according to the proportion in which they are present. Professor Tyndall, during a voyage home from Algiers, examined the subject thoroughly, bottling samples of sea-water of all shades of colour, which he afterwards examined in his laboratory by the aid of a beam of light. Absolutely pure water, entirely free from matter in suspension, has no dispersive action on light, and the path of a ray sent through it is quite invisible, but the presence of impurities, even in infinitesimal quantity, is immediately manifested by the scattering of the light to which it gives rise, after the same principle on which the motes in a sunbeam show its path. Examination of the samples proved unmistakably that a most precise relation exists between the proportion of impurity present and the resulting tint of the water. Much suspended matter produces a greenish yellow, and with each diminution in the proportion of impurities the green becomes purer and more brilliant, while blue is always characterised by a marked increase in purity. It would, in fact, require very little trouble to produce a scheme of colour, according to which, by mere eye inspection, it would be possible to decide as to the purity of any particular part of the sea.

Professor Tyndall found that the action of suspended matter in affecting the colour of the water may be efficiently demonstrated by the simple expedient of sinking a white plate by a line. The colour of such an object is invariably green, but a green which deepens gradually as it sinks, and at the greatest depth at which it can be observed, even in water of the purest indigo blue, its hue never passes beyond blue-green, and it is easy to imagine that if such a plate were ground to powder, and diffused through the water, each individual particle would act in the same way.

The colours of pure ocean water, and the varying shades observed where impurities are met with, are still further diversified by the colouring effects of the enormous multitudes of various forms of organised life

which sometimes mask the natural colour of the surface of the sea, and tinge extensive areas with remarkable colours. Red appears to be most frequently met with. In the southern parts of the Red Sea, and in the Arabian Gulf, large areas are coloured blood-red by microscopic animalcula, and in the Indian Ocean similar forms of life cause, in addition to red, milk-white or yellow spots of great extent, the appearance of which is frequently alarming to the ignorant sailor. Off the Guinea coast ships sometimes appear to float in milk. Extensive red streaks are also known to occur in the South Atlantic and South Pacific, which are caused by hosts of small red crustacea. The "Vermilion Sea" off California owes its brilliant colour to infusoria. Areas coloured green have been noted, especially in the Arctic regions, which are due to myriads of diatoms, and in some portions of the Antarctic seas diatoms of rusty colour make the water a dirty brown.

Other forms of life are capable, in special circumstances, of altering the appearance of considerable portions of the surface of the sea. The most beautiful and remarkable of all these phenomena is the phosphorescence of the sea, which is sometimes noticed on a small scale off our own coasts, and is scarcely ever absent from tropical waters, where it affords a spectacle by night the weird beauty of which baffles description. Small medusæ are the principal instruments in its production, and ascidians, crustacea, and, in fact, most pelagic animals, assist in some degree.

DR. MEREDITH'S ASSISTANT.

By MARGARET MOULE.

Author of "*The Thirteenth Brylaine*," "*Catherine Maidment's Burden*," "*Benefit of Clergy*," "*The Vicar's Aunt*," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XI.

"Oh, Jim! say it's all right. Say you think she will do! Say I've not made any mistake!"

Once more Dr. Meredith and his assistant were standing outside Rose Swinton's door. But it was eight o'clock on the following morning, and twenty-four hours since they had arrived together in the rain.

"Yes, I do say it!" he said in a voice which, though necessarily low, was excited almost to elation. "Indeed, she will do; if nothing utterly unforeseen happens she will do admirably. It's all your doing, Thea, all! I don't know how to thank you!"

The two were quite alone. Old Mr. Swinton, who had been up all night, wandering restlessly and miserably from room to room, had fallen towards morning into a heavy sleep, from which no one had waked him yet, even to hear good news.

For there was good news to hear. Throughout all the night Dr. Godfrey and the nurse had watched Rose Swinton together, fully believing that each hour as it broke must be the one to see the end.

The nurse had so completely given up hope that she would have been almost ready to give up endeavour, too, if it had not been for Dr. Godfrey. Althea shared her hopelessness to its fullest extent; but there seemed to be in her an indomitable spring of intense determination to win the fight if by any remote chance it might be possible, and whatever happened, to fight desperately to the very last. And when, just before the early summer dawn began to break, they were both uncertain for a moment whether the change that rapidly showed itself on the almost unrecognisably fevered features, was or was not the beginning of the very last change, Althea still insisted on persevering with the treatment she had steadily used without intermission all night long; persevered in spite of its apparent utter uselessness.

Half an hour later the two looked at one another in silent amazement. The change had come indeed, but it was a change to life, and not to death. And from that hour to half-past seven, when Dr. Meredith's wheels were heard, Althea had sat, motionless, watching the girlish figure sleeping the sleep which was to bring it life. She had brought Dr. Meredith in, and now, at eight o'clock, she had come out again with him to ask him the question that her trembling lips had hardly found themselves able to put into words.

As Dr. Meredith spoke his last words, she turned round to him suddenly and caught at his arm.

"Jim!" she said faintly. "Jim! Will you take me home! I'm so tired. It's very silly, but I'm very tired."

Dr. Meredith looked at her face and then drew her arm firmly into his own, took her downstairs quickly, put her straight into the waiting dogcart, and tucked the rug carefully round her.

"You'll be best in the air, I think," he said, with a careful solicitude in his tone. He went on to explain that he would only keep her waiting while he went back into

the house to leave a message for Mr. Swinton as to his own return.

Three minutes sufficed to accomplish this; at the end of that brief interval Dr. Meredith reappeared, and jumped into his place beside Althea. He gave a scrutinising glance at her before he gathered up the reins.

"Better?" he said tersely.

She made a little acquiescent movement, but she did not speak. She leaned wearily back against the rail of the seat, with her eyes fixed on the sky in front of them. Her face was almost ashen now in its pallor, and it looked utterly weary. The past night had deepened the heavy shadows under her eyes into great hollows. Her mouth had suddenly lost its determined set, and there was a droop about the corners rather like that of a worn-out, tired child's mouth. All the lines about her had relaxed into a heavy lassitude, that seemed to intensify the haggardness by the very completeness of the relaxation. In her eyes alone was there any trace of the determined spirit which had shown itself through the last day and night. Hollow though they were, in their grey depths was her own steadfast resolution; a resolution which seemed to increase as they drove along.

Dr. Meredith did not break the silence she had tacitly imposed. Something in that little gesture of hers had seemed to hold him in check; he had given her one more searching look after that, and then had seemed to concentrate his whole attention in getting his horse along as quickly as possible, and in that he succeeded. In an unusually short space of time the dogcart pulled up at Dr. Meredith's own house.

He jumped down quickly, and stood waiting for her to descend. She rose slowly, and before she put her foot on the step she stretched out her own hand and caught at the firm one which was ready to help her.

"Go in!" he said tersely. "Go straight into my room. I'm coming directly I've found William."

He looked and spoke as if he expected some opposition to his directions, but Althea made none. Without a word she turned, and went up Mrs. French's spotless doorsteps into the house. She met no one. Mrs. French was breakfasting placidly in the back premises. She pushed open the sitting-room door with a weary gesture, and let herself fall heavily into the nearest chair.

Scarcely time enough had elapsed even

for this when Dr. Meredith's step came very rapidly along the stone-flagged passage from the back of the house. He came hurriedly in, went straight to the end of the room, and returned with some brandy in a glass.

"Drink it!" he said forcibly, as Althea lifted her white face with a look that meant refusal.

Althea took the tumbler in her hand, and tried to obey. But it took her some time, and it was with a very cold and shaking hand that she gave Dr. Meredith back the glass.

"Come here," he said, taking her gently and firmly by the arm, "I'm going to light the fire, and you're going to have some breakfast."

She submitted to being led across the room to the easy-chair, half mechanically. But against the rest of his speech she protested.

"I don't want anything, thank you, Jim, and I'm not cold," she said in a weary, far-away voice, which was accompanied by an evidently involuntary shiver. "I only want to speak to you."

"Possibly I want to speak to you," he said, as he calmly proceeded to carry out the first of his intentions by striking a match. "But neither you nor I say anything until you've had something."

Either the masterful tone or her own weariness subdued Althea's resolution. She said no more, only leaned back in her chair. And when he brought her some of the breakfast that stood waiting on the table, she took it with much the same mechanical meekness with which she had let him put her into the arm-chair.

Her face was a trifle less ashen when, a quarter of an hour later, she set her cup and plate down on the table with a quick gesture.

"Now, Jim!" she said, "now you must listen to me."

In her eyes the determination that had burned in them during their drive home had deepened until it had grown into an intense light.

"I'm sorry to have behaved like a perfect idiot," she said heavily, "and I'm very sorry to waste any more of your time. No, don't," as he prepared to interrupt her. "I don't know what you want to say; but I must speak to you first. What I have to say to you is this."

She passed her hand over her forehead with a weary movement. With the gesture all the haggard relaxation in her face seemed

to increase, or to become more obvious. It was weary beyond words; there was a heavy indifference about it, that witnessed not to carelessness, but to a sort of hopeless and complete surrender of herself.

Dr. Meredith looked at her, and a great bewilderment came over his face; but he waited patiently for her to speak. He had risen and was standing, with one elbow on the mantelshelf, facing her and looking down at her. She was sitting in the chair where he had placed her; she had drawn herself, by the help, it seemed, of a hand on each arm, and was looking up at him.

"I wanted to tell you, Jim," she said slowly, "that I am going away — on Thursday."

Dr. Meredith drew his elbow away from the mantelpiece as swiftly as if something there had injured him.

"Thursday!" he repeated sharply. "Going away on Thursday! What do you mean?"

"Going away on Thursday." She reiterated the words very slowly indeed. "Haven't I said it clearly?"

Dr. Meredith replaced his elbow on the mantelpiece as if some material support were necessary to his frame of mind; and he said nothing. He had absolutely nothing to say, and no words to express the extremely irreconcilable feelings that rushed through his brain; they were all united and then disunited, for the time being, by one cloud of heavy amazement. In the midst of it he was conscious of a dull sense of surprise at himself for being so confusedly incapable of greeting the key to the situation that had so long baffled him.

"Don't mind saying that you are glad," she went on, in a heavy voice that seemed to come from something much farther away than that slight figure in the arm-chair. "For, of course, you must be; and also, of course, I understand, Jim. I have understood for quite a long time now."

Her hands were grasping the arms of the chair very tightly, and the grasp seemed to be a material evidence to her of the grasp in which she was plainly holding herself. But it was not so much a grasp which had for its object the keeping of herself in control as one with which she was dragging her whole self through an indescribable effort.

"You must have an assistant, of course," she went on. "You see, Jim, I've been here now, and I know by experience how much too much the work is for one. I

wouldn't like to think you were over-working yourself again. And, indeed, the practice must be made to stand it, or—something must be done. You will be sure and see about it at once, won't you, Jim?"

There was a little anxious, appealing tone in her last words, and the light in her eyes softened as she looked at him.

"Assistants are not difficult to find," she added, with a faint smile; "and you'll quite easily get one who will be much more help to you than I've ever been."

She stopped, and there was a silence. The only sound in the room was the creaking sound made by the now dying little bit of fire that Dr. Meredith had lighted.

It was he who broke the silence. Stretching his arm along the mantelpiece, he began to play restlessly with the end of a little ornamental pipe-rack.

"Althea," he said. Dr. Meredith very seldom used Althea's full name thus, and it lent a certain formality to his beginning; but his tone was very gentle, and his eyes as they looked down on her were full of consideration and tenderness. "I can't tell you," he went on, "how thankful I am to hear what you say! I might have known that a woman of your sense could not fail sooner or later to see things in their right light. I might have been sure you would understand it. I blame myself very much for the impatience I have shown in the matter. I think you would be glad if you could know, though, what a weight you have taken off my mind by your words!"

If Althea's ashen face could have grown a shade paler it did so; and the hands that held so fast to the arms of the chair were very cold. She looked up at him as he ended with a rather wistful look creeping into her eyes, and softening the drooping corners of her mouth.

"Jim," she said, "I wish you would tell me—I should be so glad to think that though I have made such an awful mess of it all—and you can't think how well I know that I have made an awful mess and mistake—still, I should so like to think I had been some little use to you—I'd helped you a little, if it was ever so little. I should like to have it to remember, if I could."

There was something wistful in her voice, too, and the last words were spoken very tentatively and humbly. Dr. Meredith made a sudden movement that nearly

jerked pipes, pipe-rack, and all off the mantelpiece.

"Helped me?" he said. "Why, of course you have! You know you have. You've taken half the work on your shoulders! And you needn't think that any one else will do it so well, because they won't! What I should have done, where I should have been without you, Thea, these last two days, to say nothing of anything else——"

A curious kind of spasm passed across Althea's face, and she interrupted him quickly.

"Don't!" she said. "I didn't want you to say that. You know I'm very glad if I could—if I was—any help."

Again she stopped, and again there was a pause. Dr. Meredith was silent, the tender consideration of which his face was full seeming to make it difficult to him to find words. It was Althea who spoke at last.

"I don't know quite how to make it clear," she said, "and I do so want it to be clear. I want you to understand this, Jim."

There was a quite different tone in her voice. It was steady and very dignified. There was no trace of hesitation or doubtfulness about it.

"I don't blame you or reproach you in the very least," she went on. "I never shall blame you. I shall know always—I know now—that it was all my fault. I said that Sunday that it was your doing; but now I know it was mine, and I choose it to be mine, and you are absolutely free, Jim—as free as if we had never seen each other."

Dr. Meredith gave a little start, and a shadow of troubled perplexity flitted across his face.

"Free, Thea?" he said. "That Sunday! That Sunday is nothing, nothing at all! I behaved like a brute, I know that. But if you could make some allowance for the fact that I was most tremendously taken aback, and if you could forgive me——"

He stopped abruptly, his eyes fixed on the white, set face she had slowly lifted to him.

"Thea!" he exclaimed, "you're not going to hold to what we said that day; you're not thinking of that?"

"Yes!" she said steadily. "Yes, of course I am. How can you ask it?"

"But, Thea!" he cried, with a great consternation dawning in his eyes. "Surely you know I wasn't in earnest! Surely

you know I didn't mean it! Thea, Thea, what have I done!"

He took two swift strides towards her, but she motioned him back with a quick little gesture.

"You've done nothing," she said. "It's all perfectly natural. You are very generous, Jim, and honourable, and I know you don't like the thought of going back from your word. But I go back from mine! Don't you understand? It's I who go back from mine!"

The shadow of perplexity on Dr. Meredith's face developed into a black look of utter bewilderment and dismay.

"But why, Thea?" he cried. "Why?"

"Why?" she repeated. "Don't you understand? Perhaps I'd better tell you, then; but, Jim, I didn't think you would have made me say it. Don't you see, I know—I have known for ever so long—that there's some one else you care for more than you care for me."

The bewilderment and dismay developed into a look of alarmed and hopeless incomprehension.

"Some one else?" he said slowly, in a dull, blank voice. "What can you mean, Thea? Some one else! But who?"

Quite suddenly—so suddenly that Dr. Meredith started—Althea rose from the chair in which she had been sitting all this time—rose with a swift, impetuous gesture, and stood facing him. Her white, set face was all changed and working with intense emotion; her grey eyes were flashing, and her lips trembling with passionate excitement.

"Who!" she said, "Who! Who should it be, Jim, but Rose Swinton? Hasn't your whole mind dwelt on her incessantly? Hasn't she been your one thought for days? Haven't you been ready to sacrifice anything and everything if only she might live? Do you think I'm blind, Jim, or a fool?" she put in in scornful parenthesis.

Dr. Meredith was gazing at her with wide, amazed eyes and a pale face.

"Thea!" he said rather faintly, as she paused for breath. "Thea——"

But Althea took not the least heed to his faltering words. Presumably she did not even hear them.

"Isn't it obvious," she went on excitedly, "obvious to every one—not only to me—how you care for her! Every one in Mary Combe will tell you the same thing. Every one looks upon your attention to her, and your anxiety about her, as the natural thing. Every one knows! Every one

understands! It was only I who was in the dark. But I understand too, now!"

Thus far she had not moved; but as she spoke the last words, she leaned her hand on the mantelshelf, evidently for some sort of support, and her manner changed abruptly. It was not excited, but it was defiant—a defiance that showed itself in the gesture with which she stopped Dr. Meredith when he tried again to speak.

"No, Jim!" she said. "Hear me out first. I'm going back to that Sunday. I thought then, as you yourself said just now, that it was, well—nothing. I thought it would be all right. And——" she broke off and stopped for an instant, "though I wasn't very happy, Jim," she said rather falteringly, "I went on thinking so until the day when you first asked me to go to Stoke Vere for you. I don't quite know what suggested all the truth to me then; your manner, I think, and the fact that you had never spoken of her to me—naturally enough, I see now!"

She stopped, breathless.

"If you would listen to me; if you'd only listen for one moment," cried Dr. Meredith. "Thea, I could explain it—everything!"

"Wait!" was all she said.

And Dr. Meredith, his eyes fixed in a sort of horror on her face, his own growing paler and paler, had no choice but to obey.

"Then, when I saw her, it grew clearer, of course. And it has scarcely needed your intense anxiety about her now to make me understand what is absolutely natural and simple. Oh, yes!" she repeated bitterly, "quite simple. When I was mad enough to come here, to try and help you, you hated me for my mad freak—I see that now; and it was quite reasonable that you should. And perfectly reasonable that you should turn to some one else; some one who would be more congenial to you than I—who would never distress you by such—by such unwomanly ways. Oh!"

She broke off with a sort of cry and glanced down at her dress, while a burning colour dyed her neck and the very roots of her hair.

"I detest myself! I detest myself!"

Dr. Meredith caught at her outstretched arm with a sudden, imploring gesture, but she shook his hand off as if it burnt her.

"There's some more," she said slowly. "I'll tell you it all, but it's difficult to have to make you hate me more than you do already."

She paused, and then went on still more slowly, and with hesitating breaks between her words.

"You know now," she said, "that it hasn't been easy for me to—to help you with—her. And, last night, last night, when—she—was at the lowest of all, it flashed into my mind that I'd only got to let her go and it would all be over, and she could never take my place. But, Jim, I didn't act upon it."

She lifted her eyes as she spoke to his face, now nearly as white as her own.

"I didn't begin to act upon it! But I did think of it; and you ought to know it. That's all, I think," she added heavily. "Mind, I shall never, never blame you. It is all my own doing; but if you could forgive me for coming here I should be grateful. That's all."

She took her hand from the mantelpiece and turned as if to move away. But a heavy, tremulous hand fell on her shoulder, and a strong grip turned her back.

"Thea!"

Dr. Meredith's voice was hoarse and choked with agitation.

"Thea, it is my turn now, and before I say anything else, I swear to you that I love no other woman in this world but you; and that I love you at this moment more than I ever did before."

He broke off, and his hold on her shoulder tightened convulsively.

Althea suddenly raised her miserable grey eyes to his. They grew larger and wider, wildly, and great irregular dashes of colour showed spasmodically on her white face.

"Jim!" she said in a far-away, weak voice; "Jim! You mean that you——"

"I don't know how to put it most strongly, Thea, but you have made the greatest mistake you ever made in your life. I have never given—I swear it to you on my honour—one single thought to Rose Swinton—to any one but you."

"Jim! you don't—you don't love me still?"

The words were very brokenly spoken, and then, without waiting for an answer, Althea wrenched herself from his grasp, buried her face on his shoulder, and broke into convulsive, choking sobs.

Dr. Meredith looked down on the slight shaking shoulders with his own face working oddly. But he did not speak; and, indeed, it would not have been of much use. The revulsion of feeling and the strain she had just passed through were

too much for Althea, and she sobbed absolutely uncontrollably. Dr. Meredith waited patiently, and with a great tenderness on his face, until the first break came, and Althea drew a long, weary breath. Then he said, very gently:

"Thea, if you could, I wish you would let me tell you how I hate myself for having been a fool and a brute. I must have been so inconceivably stupid to have given you the slightest foundation for such an awful mistake. But I never dreamed of such a thing—never! I was just simply very anxious, for my own credit's sake, and for her poor old father's, to pull Rose Swinton through, and I thought—well, I took for granted that you would understand, and would help me. I was a hopeless idiot!"

There was a quick catch in Althea's breath.

"No, you were not!" came in a low, smothered voice from her.

"Yes, I was," he responded quickly. "Perhaps if I'd been clearer-headed I should have understood it all, and understood you quicker. But, Thea"—he paused for one moment, and then went on in a rather lower tone—"if you've been unhappy, I haven't been very happy either. I haven't enjoyed the terms we've been on; is it likely? And I didn't know what on earth to do to alter things. I've been horribly distressed and perplexed. Perhaps," he said appealingly, "if you think of that, you could forgive me for all the misery I've brought to you."

He paused. Althea very slowly lifted her head from its resting-place, and lifted, with an evident effort, her heavy eyes to him, only to let them fall again directly.

"Can you forgive me for coming here, Jim? For all the unhappiness I've been to you?"

The sobs had not yet gone out of Althea's voice, and her imploring little speech was more than once broken by them.

Dr. Meredith raised her tear-stained face very tenderly, and turned it to his own, which was full of grave and yet passionate feeling.

"Thea," he said slowly, "Thea, my darling, though we've both been so unhappy, I wouldn't have missed this month out of our experience for anything. We shall know each other better all our lives for it, and I shall, if I can," he added, "love you better than I did for having had you for my assistant."

A week later Lady Carruthers received a

letter from her niece dated from the house in Bloomsbury. This was somewhat of a surprise to her, for as she had lately told several friends, quoting in so doing Althea's own description of her whereabouts, she had believed her niece to be staying "somewhere in the country with a friend."

The letter was in itself an unusual occurrence, for the aunt and niece never corresponded; and its contents were of a nature calculated rather to impress the occurrence upon the recipient.

"Dr. Meredith," so the letter ran, "has decided to sell his practice in the country as soon as possible, and to take one close to London. If this arrangement should be carried out, we hope to be married early in the autumn."

On this Lady Carruthers rose in her dignity, and issued something between a mandate and an invitation to her niece to come to her for at least three months previous to her wedding, that her clothes might be "seen after sensibly." And Althea obeyed with a most unwonted meekness—a meekness which characterised her throughout the whole of the three months. Towards the end of the time it had grown so marked, indeed, as to evoke a most unusual course of comment from Lady Carruthers.

"Really, Althea," she said one September day, when the aunt and niece were driving home along Piccadilly after one of

the last of their shopping expeditions; "really, I may say that it is a great satisfaction to me to feel that your engagement has been so unexceptionably carried through. I cannot say how thankful I am that your own conduct has been throughout so commendable, and never once characterised by any of that terrible unconventionality which is, or, I should say, was, your marked trait. It would have been so like you, you know, to have conducted yourself in some ridiculously unheard-of way or other! But I see that, thanks to my very careful upbringing, you have not forgotten what is due to me and yourself."

A vivid blush suffused Althea's cheek. Lady Carruthers took it, and the rather confused disclaimer that followed it, for modesty.

Fortunately for her, the mental picture that was at that moment blotting out the trees in the Green Park from Althea's eyes, and making them at the same time sparkle with covert, half-regretful humour, was for ever undreamed of by Lady Carruthers, as it would be for ever by all Althea's world beside, save her husband. Althea saw herself buying in the Mary Combe shop a large offering of sweets to assuage the grief that had been evinced by Thomas Benjamin Allen, and a group of his friends, at her departure from Mary Combe as Dr. Meredith's assistant.

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